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Chair

Mr. Bryan May

Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities

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● (1530)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Bryan May (Cambridge, Lib.)): Good afternoon, everybody. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Thursday, November 9, 2017, the committee is resuming its study of experiential learning and pathways to employment for Canadian youth.

Today the committee will hear from witnesses on the subject of apprenticeships. There is also some committee business at the end of this meeting. I hope it will not take too long—10 to 15 minutes max.

From Canada's Building Trade Unions we have Terence Snooks, International Representative, United Association of Journeymen and Apprentices of the Plumbing and Pipefitting Industry of the United States and Canada. That is one heck of a business card.

Mr. Terence Snooks (International Representative, United Association of Journeymen and Apprentices of the Plumbing and Pipefitting Industry of the United States and Canada, Canada's Building Trades Unions): That's why we just call ourselves the UA.

The Chair: Okay. Welcome, sir.

From the Canadian Apprenticeship Forum we have Sarah Watts-Rynard, Executive Director. Welcome.

From the Independent Contractors and Businesses Association of British Columbia, we have Tim McEwan, Senior Vice-President, Policy and Stakeholder Engagement.

From Polytechnics Canada we have Nobina Robinson, Chief Executive Officer; and Matthew Henderson, Policy and Data Analyst.

Coming to us via video conference from Edmonton, Alberta, from the Trade Winds to Success Training Society, is Mary Collins, Business Outreach Liaison.

Welcome to all of you. You each have seven minutes for your opening remarks. If you see me put my finger up here, don't panic; you have a minute left. A minute is a long time, but just try to wrap up your remarks.

We're going to start off with the Trade Winds to Success Training Society. Mary Collins, Business Outreach Liaison, the next seven minutes are all yours.

Ms. Mary Collins (Business Outreach Liaison, Trade Winds to Success Training Society): Thank you.

I'd like to thank Bob Blakely and the Canada's Building Trades Unions for the opportunity to be able to speak to the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

The Trade Winds to Success Training Society's indigenous pre-apprenticeship preparation program is unique in North America. Our 14- to 16-week experiential trades program is primarily funded by the federal skills and partnership fund of Service Canada, which is a sister program to the ASETS fund, also administered by the department.

Trade Winds has three urban indigenous ASETS partners, and has also worked with many of the 10 remaining rural aboriginal skills and employment training strategy holders in Alberta, which send their members to Edmonton or Calgary for opportunities to enter the trades. Since 2006, 1,257 clients have completed their pre-apprenticeship academic preparation. Trades Winds' specific mandate is to increase the number of indigenous persons employed in the skilled workforce in the province of Alberta. We have effectively delivered this mandate from two urban training sites, Edmonton and Calgary, while candidates come from across Alberta. We also deliver community workforce development projects to any interested first nations or Métis settlement in rural Alberta. Many of our graduates have made their way through their three- or four-year apprenticeship to full journeyman or journeywoman status. Our graduates have helped in building Alberta to be, until this past year, the economic driver of Canada. The current economic downturn has only resulted in greater numbers on our wait-list to enter the training program.

During groups 1 to 11, from 2006 to 2014, 93% became employed after our training, with 88% employed in trades-related work. Since the downturn in groups 12 to 15, from 2015 to 2018, 86% became employed, while 78% are working in the trade.

The Trade Winds to Success program was the result of a discussion the Alberta construction unions had with the federal government and the Alberta government back in the late nineties. The vision of the leaders of the founding unions was to address the looming skills workforce shortage predicted by 2020 as baby boomers retired. The unions sought the federal government's support to find a way to provide training to more people through their existing training facilities, with the goal of increasing the numbers of skilled labourers available to the unions and unionized employers. The federal government informed the unions to consult with the indigenous community as a potential partner for their initiative. The indigenous communities had agreements, at that time known as the aboriginal human resources development agreement, or AHRDA, with the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development, now called aboriginal skills and employment training strategy, or ASETS.

This was the beginning of a unique partnership between four unions and the indigenous communities in Alberta to increase the number of indigenous people working in the trades within the unions. There are currently nine union partners. The organization was founded in 2005 as a society in Alberta through a three-way partnership with the Alberta construction trades unions training trust funds and unionized employers, three urban aboriginal skills and employment training strategy agreement holders, which are Oteenow Employment & Training Society, Community Futures Treaty Seven, and Rupertsland Institute, and both federal and provincial funding supports.

What have we learned in the last 12 years?

Experiential learning is essential to our indigenous youth. Most indigenous learners are kinesthetic learners and need hands-on as well as academic preparation. The conventional elementary school learning model is not effective for adult learners.

● (1535)

Our adult learners succeed with peer support, visual learning, movement, and, most of all, relationally with our staff. We help our learners bridge to the reality of the workplace through trades orientation so they can choose the best fit for a trade through our job-coaching and life-skills coaching.

Our recent labour force survey of a sample of indigenous communities that have participated in a labour force survey project in their community was taken across Alberta, including in Métis settlements and first nations in Treaties Nos. 6, 7, and 8. In the sample, 2,072 indigenous people of working age were interviewed regarding barriers to employment and educational interests. The sample showed that 17% of those surveyed were interested in employment in the trades. Of all the males who were surveyed, 28% of them were interested in employment in the trades, and 8% of the females who were surveyed also wanted employment in the trades. The age range was from 16 to 30 and the total number of indigenous youth who were interested in the trades was 18%.

In Trade Winds today, first nations, Métis, and Inuit individuals are still recruited to participate in the 16-week program in Edmonton and Calgary. Currently, 86% pass the Alberta apprenticeship entrance exam. On a one-to-one basis, Trade Winds staff assist participants to make informed choices and help them navigate their journey by addressing individual barriers to success.

I quickly want to give you three key messages. First, experiential learning is key to the successful transition of indigenous youth into the trades through the unionized hands-on shop training centres. Next is closing the gap: Trade Winds brings academic preparation to strengthen candidates' readiness through the apprenticeship process. Last is Truth and Reconciliation's section 92, part (ii): the visionary leadership of Canada's trade unions conceived of Trade Winds long before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission grew in our Canadian consciousness.

● (1540)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we'll go to Terence Snooks, from Canada's Building Trades Unions. He's an international representative of the United Association of Journeymen and Apprentices of the Plumbing and Pipefitting Industry of the United States and Canada.

Mr. Terence Snooks: Thank you. You saved me from saying it.

On the topic of experiential learning and pathways to employment for Canadian youth, I'll begin by looking at youth underemployment after completing their education.

Young people today are often the recipients of incorrect information regarding work opportunities in the construction industry. The direction to students from most teachers and guidance counsellors is to go to university and avoid settling for the trades path if they are considered high achievers. Unfortunately, this characterization of trades being an avenue meant for non-academics is still held in the minds of many. Consequently, top-scoring students who could excel on a skilled trade career path are typically directed towards continued post-secondary university programs to prepare themselves for future career prospects. This means we end up with many university-educated people entering an oversaturated marketplace with insufficient work opportunities to match the programs they're trained for.

The opportunities for work and a rewarding future in the trades are expanding rapidly across Canada. There are hundreds of thousands of jobs available in all fields of expertise. Emerging technologies will impact all areas of work. The need for highly skilled technicians and tradespeople will play a major role in the building of our Canadian infrastructure. It is for this reason in particular that the pathway into skilled trades should be identified as a fundamental consideration within our education system. If we ascertain that young people are aware of these viable options outside of university, we will be ensuring that they do not overlook rewarding opportunities and are better equipped to make informed career choices that align with the demands of the workforce in Canada.

I'll now turn to the school-to-work transition strategy in Canada compared with international models. There are systems currently utilized to train apprentices within the European Union that Canada should consider adopting in various capacities in order to better prepare workers for career opportunities in the trades. The concept of developing apprentices from the grade 8 level and providing them with a path to harness their interest in the trades is proactive and is a plan for success. Students are exposed to shop and skilled training classes as part of their schooling, and then rewarded with transferable credits that are recognized toward continued training and applicable in their future endeavours for higher learning. This will further align them to pursue such dual-training pathways as engineer and plumber, each of which are recognized independently as professions that are valued at par with doctors, lawyers, and other professionals for their expertise.

The construction industry is 14% of the gross domestic product for Canada. It is a very large segment, with thousands of jobs in many areas. The demographics of the industry today show mass retirements coming in a few short years, with no real plan in place to replace these highly skilled, experienced workers. Many thousands of underemployed Canadians can't find work because they have not been trained to work in the available jobs. Planning from an early age to develop a national workforce is key to the future success of the country.

Next, apprenticeships are an industry model that have been changed in many ways over the last 100 years. Most times these changes have been made without the people who make the rules listening to the people who build the country. Tradespeople in Canada know how to build, and know what is needed for the future. Unfortunately, in many instances they are the last ones consulted, or are even overlooked entirely, when changes are to be made to the system based on policies that are believed to bring positive change. Many times the public and private colleges are consulted on how to fix apprenticeship and industry, when in fact they are often the least qualified to perform this role.

To have meaningful apprenticeship systems, the organizations that have been doing this for many years with proven success are the ones that should be consulted regarding meaningful change. It can be considered an oversight to treat unions as a last resort due to misplaced political perceptions that may arise and that have no place in such a process. Training people the right way for the right reasons is the key to the success of everyone. Involving unions to provide their valuable insight regarding building trades in relation to construction, maintenance, service, and any type of future planning is the right thing to do. UA Canada is fully involved in apprenticeship with the Government of Canada. Along with its clients, contractors, and owners, it remains dedicated to ensuring a strong future for Canada's workforce.

● (1545)

Our proactive approach to investing in our future through constantly evolving the training system within Canada has been one of our distinguishing contributions over the last 125 years. We are ready and welcome the opportunity to work with all levels of government on issues affecting workforce development now and into the future.

Next, on workforce planning for youth and diversity, UA Canada is at present working on strategies for the future in the trades, with a focus on youth while at the same time ensuring we are diverse in our workforce. We want to be inclusive of all people, which is part of our union heritage and policies and is at the heart of what we do as an organization. We take care of people and put them to work in meaningful, quality jobs that inevitably lead to great careers, including all the benefits of equal opportunity and equal representation. We have a vested interest in the quality of our workforce and their success. We believe the Government of Canada should look at working with UA Canada toward developing our future workforce, and we are ready to build that future together.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Snooks.

I am now going to the Canadian Apprenticeship Forum, with Sarah Watts-Rynard, executive director.

The next seven minutes are yours.

Ms. Sarah Watts-Rynard (Executive Director, Canadian Apprenticeship Forum): Thank you for your invitation to appear today on the subject of experiential learning and pathways to employment for Canadian youth. I have submitted a brief that builds on and supports some of my remarks today.

The Canadian Apprenticeship Forum is a national non-profit organization that looks at apprenticeship and its challenges through a national lens. Though regulated by the jurisdictions, apprenticeship stakeholders assign value to connecting the dots across trades, across sectors, and across Canada. The Canadian Apprenticeship Forum provides a national voice, influencing apprenticeship strategies through research and collaboration. We also connect stakeholders to share promising practices, and we promote apprenticeship as a valued post-secondary pathway.

Like other post-secondary credentials, trades certification is a foundation for future career success. Tradespeople are in high demand across Canada and around the world. Journeypersons are Canada's entrepreneurs, trades instructors, union leaders, supervisors, and mentors. Studies show that tradespeople are among the happiest and most fulfilled workers in Canada. Apprenticeship builds workplace-relevant skills, expertise, and confidence in high-demand fields throughout the Canadian economy. It's industry driven and workplace responsive.

When considering the work-integrated learning spectrum, I would suggest that most other forms of experiential learning could benefit from what we know about apprenticeship.

For example, Canadian Apprenticeship Forum research shows that only 19% of skilled trades employers are actively engaged in apprenticeship training. According to Statistics Canada, three-quarters of apprentices are being trained in companies with fewer than 100 employees, suggesting that the bulk of the training is occurring in companies with the fewest resources to support it.

This is within a system where work-based learning is the way we produce the next generation of tradespeople. This is in occupations that employers across sectors consistently say are the hardest to fill, yet still only one in five employers is participating. That tells me that employer engagement is going to be a fundamental challenge for the broader experiential learning policy.

To garner the support of employers, there must be a compelling business case for their involvement. Employers need a clear line of sight into the benefits of employing learners as part of their business models, and we recommend that all government programs focused on school-to-work transition and labour market participation of youth include efforts to support the deeper integration of employers in the education system.

Despite a tradition of experiential learning in the trades, we know the quality of workplace training to be uneven. Even with regulatory frameworks, occupational standards, and end point assessment, there is no guarantee of quality. There are a couple of things to keep in mind.

The first is the importance of workplace mentorship by people who are knowledgeable and committed to learner success. The second is a clear need for learning objectives—a training plan, so to speak. Finally, there is value in monitoring and evaluating results to ensure future spending is targeted on what works; this ensures that government funding is having a net new effect, rather than supporting activity that would have occurred without government investment.

Taking those things into consideration, our recommendations focus on four areas.

The first relates to stronger career awareness work under the youth employment strategy. According to the 2015 national apprenticeship survey, 78% of those who pursued apprenticeship were not considering it while they were in high school.

Simply put, apprenticeship has not been promoted as an equal pillar of post-secondary education. Educators and parents must have appropriate resources to support career choices that differ from their own. Efforts should be made to ensure that experiential learning opportunities are broadly available across sectors, occupations, and post-secondary routes to ensure learners have opportunities to test a wide variety of career options. Funding levels and targets should align with areas of identified economic opportunity.

Our second recommendation relates to employer engagement. Traditionally, employers and education have been isolated from one another, right up to the point where graduates seek a job. In this environment, skills mismatch seems inevitable.

● (1550)

Internationally, persistently low youth unemployment occurs in countries where education and the country's economic interests are much more closely aligned. Though employers are integral to apprenticeship training, 35% of apprentices reported difficulties finding an employer sponsor; nearly 30% have experienced periods of unemployment; and while unemployed nearly half considered leaving the trades.

We recommend that skilled trades employers, particularly those with fewer than 100 employees, be provided with access to wage subsidy programs targeting apprenticeships. This is critical to increasing employer engagement in the first two years, when investment in training often outweighs the apprentice's ability to contribute to their employer's bottom line.

Further, both apprentices and employers would benefit from programs and services geared to matching employers with those seeking work.

Our third recommendation circles back to the concept of quality training. We would like to see experiential learning monitored and evaluated. A focus on outcomes would be beneficial for both the learner and the employer. Objective evaluation across all programs will serve to identify where government funding is effective and where it's having limited impact.

Finally, I would like to see government lead by example. In many cases, labour and employment agreements are being used as excuses for failing to hire apprentices within maintenance departments, fleet management, and other roles where certified tradespeople are currently employed. This serves to lay the burden of apprenticeship training on small- and medium-sized businesses.

Further, on government contracts or awards in infrastructure and procurement, contractors serving on federally funded projects should be encouraged to use apprentices where appropriate to the work. This will reward firms that are contributing to training the next generation of tradespeople rather than failing to recognize their investments.

I will end my comments there, though I welcome any questions you might have. Thank you again for the opportunity to appear today.

● (1555)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now, from the Independent Contractors and Businesses Association of British Columbia, we have Tim McEwan, Senior Vice-President, Policy and Stakeholder Engagement.

Go ahead for seven minutes, sir.

Mr. Tim McEwan (Senior Vice-President, Policy and Stakeholder Engagement, Independent Contractors and Businesses Association of British Columbia): Thank you very much, Chair, and through you to the committee members.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide our suggestions on the important topic of experiential learning and pathways to employment for Canadian youth. This is a very important topic for the standing committee to consider in light of the changing nature of work, shifting and aging demographics, and the need for both the providers and consumers of construction services to address succession challenges within the Canadian workplace.

By way of background, ICBA has been a leading voice for the construction industry in British Columbia for 43 years. We represent more than 2,000 members and clients who collectively employ over 50,000 people. ICBA advocates for its members in support of a vibrant construction industry, responsible resource development, and a growing economy for the benefit of all British Columbians.

On an annual basis, ICBA undertakes a comprehensive survey of our membership to provide us with a proverbial "state of the union" on skills issues within the B.C. construction sector. From a top-line perspective, the survey underscores that for at least the short term, times remain good, with significant construction activity and more work than workers available. The vibrance of the construction sector, though, is challenged with significant skill shortages. Across the broad range of trades, especially in the core construction trades, shortages of glaziers, pipefitters, sheet metal workers, electricians, and plumbers are widespread, slowing down growth in some firms and leading to potential forgone opportunities for growth and job creation. Overall, fully 75% of the companies we surveyed said that there are not enough qualified workers in the trades that they require. That's up from 59% in 2017.

In terms of ICBA's role in apprenticeship training, we are a leading sponsor of apprenticeship training in British Columbia. In fact, ICBA is the single largest sponsor of construction apprentices in our province. During 2017, ICBA sponsored 1,200 apprentices. The top five construction apprentice trades sponsored were electricians, plumbers, glaziers, carpenters, and refrigeration and air-conditioning mechanics. Beyond these top trades, ICBA sponsors apprentices in another two dozen trades in total. Our association is committed to working with our members to ensure that we are boosting the numbers of under-represented groups, including women in trades, indigenous peoples, and persons with disabilities.

Our organization's role in and commitment to apprenticeship training and sponsorship occurs against the reality that 90% of our members are small and medium-sized businesses. Small and medium-sized employers often have on-the-ground operational realities that may restrict them from fully participating in apprenticeship training. For example, the absence of an apprentice for six to 10 weeks annually, when classroom training takes place, can impair business continuity. Cost can be a significant consideration for the smallest employers, particularly those with 10 employees or fewer, or new start-ups.

Mindful of these challenges, ICBA assists by taking care of the administration and paperwork that participating small construction firms would otherwise have to undertake, leaving them to focus on their core business activities. Our approach to assisting firms with apprenticeship training also achieves a number of other positive interrelated objectives.

It can offer an apprentice exposure to the business side of construction should they wish to establish their own company once they receive full certification as a journeyperson. This is increasingly important as part of succession planning in smaller firms. It offers seamless transfer from one employer to another to ensure that the apprenticeship continues through to completion. It allows for a deeper level of assistance for apprentices who may be struggling with the in-school portion of an apprenticeship through the provision of additional learning resources when and where they are required. It continues to grow apprenticeship capacity in the system by bridging what otherwise could be a failure of the market to provide firms, especially smaller ones, with an avenue for training. Finally, it assists apprentices in networking and building relationships with a variety of employers as part of their career development.

● (1600)

This approach has served ICBA member companies and the consumers of construction services in B.C. well in the open marketplace, in both public and private sector construction. For firms of smaller size—that is, those under 20 employees—government should encourage consortia approaches, where they make sense, to deliver work towards training.

In addressing the skilled training needs of our membership, and collaterally the standing committee's mandate to study experiential learning and pathways to employment, ICBA also supports our members and their employees with a suite of broad-based professional development courses. In 2017 we trained over 3,300 people across 268 different courses that are recognized by various accrediting bodies and delivered in cities and job sites throughout British Columbia. For example, the top five courses in 2017 were foreman training, construction project management, construction law, negotiation skills, and responsibilities of joint occupational health and safety committees. These ongoing professional development post-apprenticeship courses are important for our members and their employers, and they also open up new career pathways for a skilled worker. Importantly for our sponsored apprentices, these include exposure to entrepreneurship and the opportunity for some to aspire to equity participation, business partnership, or incorporation of their own firms as they acquire new experience and business skills beyond their core trade or skilled occupation.

For today's youth employment challenges—not least the rise of the digital economy and more itinerant forms of work—government, business, and educational institutions need to do more to expose students to apprenticeship as a legitimate form of education. While there is a lot we do not know about younger workers, what we do know is that they place a high value on choice, flexibility, and opportunities to learn new skills in the workplace. These things are best accomplished by focusing on a few interrelated measures beginning in the secondary school system in Canada.

These measures could include enhancing focus on and exposure to apprenticeship in trades in grades 8 to 10, which should include exposing students to a range of trades and related opportunities in a way that provides equal billing and curricula to professional disciplines; increasing the amount and scope of high school level apprenticeship training, which ladders into college and polytechnical institutions; working with local business communities to provide mentorship and internship opportunities that expose high school students to a range of trades training pathways from a practical perspective. In other words, if students can touch and feel the nature of work, chances are better that they will determine a pathway suited to their interests and aspirations than they will if exposure is merely provided theoretically in the classroom. Working with small, medium, and large employers to incentivize, through financial and non-financial means, and exposing students early to a full range of apprenticeship training opportunities are also very important, as are instilling in high school students entrepreneurialism and the idea of being their own boss as a legitimate, challenging, and potentially highly rewarding pathway to full-time employment. The entrepreneurial opportunities that flow from learning a construction trade are often overlooked when educating young people on the career paths presented to them through acquiring these skills.

On behalf of our association, thank you very much for the opportunity to outline our role and our perspectives on experiential learning and pathways to employment. I look forward to the question-and-answer period.

The Chair: Thank you, sir.

Last but not least, from Polytechnics Canada, is Nobina Robinson, Chief Executive Officer; and Matthew Henderson, Policy and Data Analyst.

Go ahead for seven minutes, please.

Ms. Nobina Robinson (Chief Executive Officer, Polytechnics Canada): Thank you very much for your invitation, Mr. Chair.

Before I get going, I want to say that you're going to hear many of today's ideas repeated in what I have to say. I apologize; we didn't coordinate before we showed up.

I am accompanied today by Matt Henderson. He leads our work on apprenticeship and captures a lot of our data on learning.

I'm also pleased to be here both in my capacity at Polytechnics Canada and as a champion member of the Canadian Apprenticeship Forum. I commend Sarah Watts-Rynard for her very thorough presentation.

Our Polytechnics Canada formal submission to your study makes recommendations that go beyond today's discussion on apprenticeship in proposing solutions for youth unemployment in Canada and post-secondary experiential learning, that which is referred to as work-integrated learning, but today I will focus on your interest in apprenticeship.

As countries prepare to cope with the changing nature of work, the two trends of automation and innovation have dominated policy discourse not only in Canada, but across the globe. These trends, combined with looming retirements, necessitate that individuals, both young and old, enter the labour market with relevant skills for the workplaces of tomorrow.

In these conversations about innovation, automation, and the changing nature of work, one group has been consistently underestimated, and that is Canada's skilled tradespeople, and more importantly, our apprentices. The contribution of these learners and the publicly funded post-secondary institutions at which they train is not well understood.

Polytechnics Canada represents those institutions as a national association of the country's largest, research-intensive, publicly funded polytechnics and colleges, serving over 400,000 students and 45,000 apprentices annually.

The applied nature of polytechnic education necessitates that students spend time in the environments in which they will eventually work. As such, work-integrated learning is in the DNA of the polytechnic applied model of education, more so than a university education. Polytechnics have long placed a strong emphasis on skilled trades training, providing the automation-enabling talent that will be required to build and maintain our innovation economy.

The dominant view is that experiential learning is the same as co-op placements. We know that it extends well beyond mere co-ops. Even more distinct, apprenticeship is a unique form of work-based learning, where 80% of the learning occurs on the job and 20% occurs in schools or other training organizations.

As we move into an increasingly automated future and the government sets its sights on innovation through all that is high tech, let's recognize that Canada's apprentices and the institutions they train at are already operating at the forefront of technology.

To keep pace and to ensure the success of apprentices, classrooms are as innovative as the environments in which they will operate. Apprentices are learning to diagnose engine problems using tablet-based applications, familiarizing themselves with work in a variety of environments through the use of virtual and augmented simulators, and taking courses delivered online through blended learning to allow for theory-based knowledge to be transferred while on remote job sites.

These technical skills are really important, but the future of work will depend on a combination of technical and soft skills. Polytechnic apprenticeship programs have evolved, just as the skills required in the labour market have evolved as well.

Let me give you an example. The trades to degrees program at the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology in Edmonton enables qualified trades professionals with management work experience to enter the third year of a Bachelor of Business Administration program. This builds on their previous education and professional experience to further refine their soft skills and to open doors into entrepreneurship, leadership, and management opportunities.

Next, the future of all work will need to be inclusive, and Canada's polytechnics are leaders in the delivery of apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs that are targeted at non-traditional tradespeople.

● (1605)

The women in skill trades pre-apprenticeship program offered by Conestoga in Waterloo is just one example. The 34-week carpenter general certificate program there equips students who wish to make a career in the construction industry with the basic skills required to secure a position as an apprentice.

The curriculum provides students with basic-level apprentice training, but also incorporates components such as job search and communication skills as well as training in computer literacy and related applications. Canada's polytechnics produce highly skilled, multi-disciplinary talent that grows both the knowledge economy and the know-how economy, yet we often forget that the knowledge economy and the know-how economy enable each other. As the impact of technology increases, our skilled tradespeople are critical to success in the new world of work. They are, in fact, automation enablers.

I will now go on to our specific policy prescriptions for apprenticeship. I remind you that we also have recommendations on post-secondary work-integrated learning, as you will have seen in our formal submission.

First, on point of principle, your report should commit to the logic of parity of esteem across all forms of post-secondary education and help break the societal bias that perpetuates the hierarchy of credentials that often undervalues apprenticeship as a viable career option. In particular, the employment prospects of apprentices should be a federal priority, given the looming retirement numbers in the skilled trades professions.

Second, we recommend that the federal government leverage its own investments to amplify experiential learning and apprenticeship where possible. Your report should specifically encourage the government to link infrastructure to workforce development through a community benefits framework that prioritizes apprenticeship.

I encourage the committee members to consider and include recommendations that this committee itself issued in 2013 in its report "Economic Opportunities for Young Apprentices", many of which still hold much merit and relevance and have yet to be acted on by the federal government.

Apprenticeship has long been an undervalued pathway for Canadians looking to enter the labour market. The result of apprenticeships is a win-win-win. Students get the hands-on experience they need; employers find the talent they need to grow; and Canada becomes more innovative, more productive, and more inclusive.

I look forward to our discussion.

● (1610)

The Chair: Thank you to all of you.

First up for questions is MP Blaney.

Go ahead, please.

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Win-win-win: what a good way to end this round of testimony. We sure agree all around this table.

[*Translation*]

Welcome everyone, and thank you for being here.

[*English*]

Mr. Snooks, I could not agree more with you when you said that we are not valuing and promoting trades enough. The largest refinery in Quebec is in my riding. They are in shutdown now. They are investing tens of millions of dollars. Pipefitters are involved almost seven days per week working almost 12 hours. They are well paid. It's a great job, and they are great citizens to have, and still, as you mentioned, we promote careers with university degrees, and there is so much we can do.

[*Translation*]

I am going to say this in French. Perhaps you will understand; if not, you can rely on the interpretation.

In Canada, we like to say that we need people who shower after work and not just people who shower before work.

[*English*]

My first question is for Ms. Sarah Watts-Rynard.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Watts-Rynard, in your recommendations, you say that it is important to have subsidy programs.

I am a conservative. Our government established a tax credit for apprenticeships. It started at $2,000 and it covered 10% of the salary that employers pay their employees. Then we increased it to $2,500.

Is that the kind of program you have in mind? If so, how could it be enhanced?

[*English*]

Ms. Sarah Watts-Rynard: I would say that when it comes to wage subsidies in the apprenticeship space, there are some available through some of the provinces, but all of the federal wage subsidy programs are really focused on post-graduates. Apprentices are not graduates yet, so they are actually going through their post-secondary pathway and as a result aren't generally eligible for any of the federal wage subsidy programs that are currently available.

Hon. Steven Blaney: So your recommendation would be to make those programs available to those undergraduates?

Ms. Sarah Watts-Rynard: Yes. I think in order for them to work for apprentices and their employers, we have to take into account the fact that in their first couple of years, the apprentices are in a learning process. They aren't making the same kind of contribution to the bottom line until after the second year, and these are small companies, by and large, taking on those apprentices.

● (1615)

Hon. Steven Blaney: Thank you.

Mr. McEwan, you mentioned a number that really struck me. You said that among your current membership, 75% have a shortage of tradespeople. Is that correct?

Mr. Tim McEwan: Yes, that's correct, Mr. Blaney.

Hon. Steven Blaney: You mentioned many recommendations. Which one would be your silver bullet to address this issue of fulfilling those needs?

Mr. Tim McEwan: As I guess you heard here today from all of the witnesses, this is a joint responsibility of government, business, and the education sector. We are faced with some critical trade shortages. I think there is a need for the committee to think about pinpointing where additional resources could be added to the system that would have the biggest bang for the buck in terms of the return on investment.

The other thing that I think needs some further focus, and I hasten to add that it's across the education sector, is completion rates and getting those numbers up. We certainly try to do that through the bridging mechanisms we have with our largely small and medium-sized employers.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Okay.

Madam Robinson, is there something you'd like to add regarding the huge challenge here? I think it's the same challenge in Quebec City as it is in British Columbia. There's a shortage. Of course, we can recruit elsewhere, but what do we do with our youth? You touched on this issue. Mr. McEwan mentioned awareness. What is your take on this?

Ms. Nobina Robinson: Despite the fact that it is a shared jurisdiction issue, the Government of Canada has a role to play in providing better data to learners, to help people make informed choices about their careers. The data that we really don't have is on the demand side, on all the skills and such. That's not getting to the high school guidance counsellors. That's not getting to the parents.

On the awareness piece, we need to have evidence—for example, pipefitter earning the first year after certifying. We need earning data. We don't have it. Going to StatsCan, we still don't have it. And that data is there. That's one big doable to break on the awareness side.

The other one is this. You have this funny situation in the federal government where the trade stuff is all done by ESDC. The rusted jobs are over there. All the high-tech talent, automation, and innovation strategy is in ISED. Those are the highly qualified people.

Hon. Steven Blaney: That's a good point.

Ms. Nobina Robinson: We are perpetuating the bias even in how we speak. We need to talk about a talent pipeline—all of it. We keep talking about diversity. Have we ever looked at how many tradespeople are doing R and D in some of the very small firms that we want to grow and have export?

Hon. Steven Blaney: Yes. Even our structure is condescending. That's a very good point.

Thank you.

The Chair: MP Long, please.

Mr. Wayne Long (Saint John—Rothesay, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd certainly like to welcome my friend MP Vecchio back to HUMA for a brief appearance.

I come from the riding of Saint John—Rothesay in New Brunswick. I think it goes without saying that we have the largest refinery in eastern Canada. It's a very labour-oriented, union-oriented industrial riding, like that of my friend MP Blaney.

I was at an event about a year ago hosted by Irving Oil. I was shocked; with respect to the trades, over the next five years in southern New Brunswick there will be 1,200 empty trades jobs. They are having trouble filling them. They launched a program, in conjunction with UA Canada and the National Association of Union Schools and Colleges, called REWARD. I'm not sure if you're familiar with it. It's the regional education welder apprentice retention and development program.

Mr. Snooks, how important is it that industry comes up with programs like that to encourage young apprentices to get involved and join?

● (1620)

Mr. Terence Snooks: It's extremely important. With the REWARD program, in particular—and we're trying to get clients involved across the country—the client is guaranteeing the apprenticeship program for the individuals. They don't employ the individuals. Companies that work for the client, that are signatory to us, employ them, but under direction from the client. The client is guaranteeing the completion of the apprenticeship for these individuals. That's key: completion of apprenticeships. Mr. McEwan mentioned it. I'm not going to start the union/non-union argument, but unions control their apprenticeships a little bit better. Still, we don't have exceptional completion rates in our apprenticeship program.

This guarantees that any youth coming in can finish their apprenticeship and enjoy a future from there on.

Mr. Wayne Long: I'm going to jump in here. It was very refreshing that out of the 10 apprentices, five or six were female. That was very encouraging. Correct me if I'm wrong, but there's been no improvement in women in the labour force over 30 years; no uptake. In my opinion, recruitment efforts to get women to join labour jobs will only be successful if there is apprentice-style training.

What can we do as a government to encourage more women to join the labour movement?

Mr. Terence Snooks: I think it's just education. The women you talked about aren't in the program because they're women. They're in the program because they were the best candidates for the job. There are a lot of women out there who are interested, but we have to get the message out there that these jobs are available to all people.

Mr. Wayne Long: Ms. Robinson and Mr. Snooks, you both talked about how the trades and post-secondary need to be aligned and need to work more together to make sure that the proper training is offered. Would you agree? Mr. Snooks, you said, and I'm just going to quote you, that you're "the last ones consulted" sometimes, for change on how apprentice programs should work.

Do you feel there is alignment between post-secondary, polytech, what have you, and labour, with respect to offering those programs? What would you suggest to align better?

Mr. Terence Snooks: I think you have to communicate with the trades themselves to get the proper curriculum in the schools. I'm not sure that we are always on the same line. There's a standard training and there's the training that's required. I don't believe the two are always on the same path, because nobody is consulted.

Mr. Wayne Long: Does anybody else want to answer?

Ms. Nobina Robinson: We all think we know what apprenticeship is, but we don't really. I certainly would have to admit to you that when I took this job nine years ago, I did not know how it was delivered.

Let me make it real for you. If you're Algonquin College here in Ottawa, or La Cité collégiale, you are delivering publicly funded, post-secondary programs, diplomas, credentials, or, in the case of Algonquin, degrees. In addition, the province has come and and given you seats to offer apprenticeship training. It's all controlled by the provinces...the jurisdictional aspect of it all.

You can't just say, "I'm open to 1,000 apprentices." You get your allocation, and the college has to go find the employers that are willing to have that apprentice. It's dealt with outside post-secondary. While colleges offer a large number of apprentice training programs, we're doing so outside post-secondary.

The parity of esteem that I want is that by grade 8, students are told that, by grade 12 and onwards, they could do this or they could do this, and this is what both will lead to. The average starting age of a first-year apprentice is 26, if I'm not mistaken. That means they have come to apprenticeship later.

● (1625)

Mr. Wayne Long: Yes, you're right.

Ms. Nobina Robinson: The alignment that I'm talking about is less about the unions—that happens in the case of the CCDA and the Canadian Apprenticeship Forum bringing all jurisdictions together. The alignment I'm talking about treats this as equal learning, which is why I'm so proud of the Canada apprentice loan. It was put through in 2014, and treats a student as both a learner and an apprentice.

Mr. Wayne Long: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we go over to Madam Sansoucy for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My thanks to all the witnesses for the information they have given us.

In your presentations, we have clearly seen the extent to which apprenticeship programs are an excellent way of preparing people for a career in a given trade. You also told us about the challenges you face in your areas.

In my constituency, efforts have been made to promote careers in the trades, and the effect was to increase the number of registrations in the École professionnelle de Saint-Hyacinthe.

That promotion was done in various ways. For example, all students in the public high schools spend a day in the vocational school so that they can try out various trades. In recent years, we have seen international education students now going to the vocational school after finishing high school, whereas before, they went off to post-secondary studies.

I would like to take advantage of your expertise to find out whether it would be possible to expand apprenticeship programs to non-specialized jobs. Let me explain why I want to know that.

When I visit entrepreneurs in my constituency, they tell me that employees in their companies are retiring and taking all their knowledge with them. They would appreciate it if, in the final years, when the productivity of those employees is dropping, either because of age or their physical abilities, they could pass on their knowledge to young people entering the company. They are the employees who really know to operate the equipment and the ways of working. As they are often SMEs, they do not have sufficient resources to pay the salaries of both an employee two years away from retirement and of a young employee just entering the company.

In your opinion, would salary subsidies mean that the young people and the mentors could be paired up before the latter retire? It could be a way of dealing with the situation. Other witnesses have told us that, in seven years, Quebec will have over a million jobs to fill. It is difficult to build a bridge between the available jobs and the people looking for them, especially kids who have dropped out of high school before they finish.

You are very familiar with apprenticeship programs. Is there a way to expand those programs to the kinds of non-specialized jobs, for which, in the constituency I represent, there is a shortage of labour.

I see that you are nodding your head, Ms. Robinson. So let me ask you the question.

● (1630)

[*English*]

Ms. Nobina Robinson: Thank you. If I understood your questions, you're asking me, one, if there is a possibility of expanding apprenticeship models to other professions that are not traditional trades, and two, about the wage subsidy.

I believe that one should be able to say that more professions need that apprenticeship model, but in Canada that will be very hard. We have 390-odd trades that have that "apprenticeable" model, but for graphic design or animation arts, let's say, we haven't made those apprenticeable professions. Instead, we're doing work-integrated learning. That's what you're admiring in Europe. It's difficult to bring that into Canada without causing all kinds of other distortions.

On your point on wage subsidies, the federal government is very proud of a new program, the student work-integrated learning program, SWILP. Did you know, Madam Sansoucy, that it does not apply to apprentices? Why is that?

So yes, we can do more with wage subsidies, and maybe my colleague, Sarah Watts-Rynard, would have some thoughts.

Ms. Sarah Watts-Rynard: It goes back to what I was saying earlier. Just because apprentices are in the midst of their post-secondary training rather than being completers of that training, they're currently not eligible for those wage subsidy programs. It puts them behind the eight ball a bit when you see a program such as the student work-integrated learning program, as an example, which actually incents employers to take on people who have done perhaps a technician or a technology diploma in a college, but not to take on somebody straight into the workforce as an apprentice.

Really, what it has served to do is to undermine apprenticeship instead of supporting it, in that it becomes those programs.... You have to hire them as a full-time worker. You don't hire them as an apprentice under those wage subsidy programs the way they currently exist, which is why my recommendation is that either we have wage subsidies that are appropriate to apprenticeship, or we expand the definition to include post-secondary learners at any stage of their learning pathway, rather than only once they've completed.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Okay, thank you.

My next questions goes to Ms. Collins in Edmonton.

You said you have a unique program and I am curious to know whether it exists anywhere else.

The main not-for-profit organization with an apprenticeship program is chronically underfunded. You said that you wanted to increase your programming and that you have long waiting lists.

What do you need to get your waiting lists reduced and to increase the range of your programs.

● (1635)

[*English*]

The Chair: You have almost no time left, but I'll allow a quick answer.

Ms. Mary Collins: Probably I would say more funding—double or triple what we receive currently. We can train 260 indigenous clients per year. We need to do more.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we go over to Mr. Morrissey, please.

Mr. Robert Morrissey (Egmont, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

My question is to Ms. Collins, and I'll follow up from my colleague.

You referenced that your training is unique in North America. Could you explain a bit about what makes it unique?

Ms. Mary Collins: It would be our partnerships with the indigenous assets holders as well as the union training centres. As well, of course, recently we've gone out to the first nations communities as well as the Métis settlements here in Alberta. And, of course, it's also the employers.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: What trades do you focus on?

Ms. Mary Collins: Currently, it's carpenters, electricians, plumbers, pipefitters, welders, insulators, ironworkers, and, of course, construction craft labourers.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Do you have the same issue with female versus male?

Ms. Mary Collins: No, right now we have about 25% female graduates.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Okay, very good. Congratulations.

Ms. Mary Collins: Thank you.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: I have a question for Mr. Snooks. And I'm a former provincial minister responsible for trades and apprenticeship.

If I recall correctly, the European countries were always viewed as a model of how to do apprenticeship right. Is that still the case?

Mr. Terence Snooks: Absolutely, they are. They've done it right for decades now.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: So how come we're still doing it wrong then?

Mr. Terence Snooks: I don't know. Maybe it's time we started listening.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: If you could just condense it for a moment—and I would appreciate a comment from Ms. Robinson as well as from you—what are we continuing to do differently from what Europe is doing today?

Mr. Terence Snooks: A lot of it is what we've already discussed. It is the aura around people getting into the trades. If you go back to Germany, they say "You're professional. You're rated up there with the top people." It's a career. I'm from England—

Mr. Robert Morrissey: But that's the same comment I was getting 20 years ago.

Mr. Terence Snooks: I'm from England originally. The plumber used to go to work—and he may still do it—in a shirt and tie.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Yes.

Mr. Terence Snooks: They act like professionals, and they're treated like professionals, and that's the big difference, I think.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: That's interesting.

Ms. Robinson.

Ms. Nobina Robinson: I totally concur, because at the end of the day, we're talking about craft. And in fact, it's interesting when you think about the changing nature of work, that we've come back to a world where craft is how we're going to survive in an automation economy. It's the working with the hands; it's the personal touch. But that's a whole other discussion.

To your question—and it constantly comes up—on why we can't be more like Europe, that means that by grade 8, we're going to have to tell the students to spend one day on the job and spend four days in the classroom. Are we prepared to disrupt our K-to-12 model? Until we are, we're going to be up against the same thing. In 20 years, it hasn't changed, because we're telling them about apprenticeship only when they're finishing high school, by which time the guidance counsellor has come in and done their damage and told them to go to university. Why? Because the guidance counsellor was trained at a university to be a teacher. We all want to perpetuate what we know instead of doing what my colleague Sarah Watts-Rynard said, which is for parents to show a different future path to their children.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Would there be any guidance counsellors in our school system—this may be an unfair question—who come from a trades background?

● (1640)

Ms. Nobina Robinson: I wouldn't know, because I'm not an expert in the K-to-12 world.

Maybe I would ask my colleagues if they know.

The Chair: They're almost all teachers.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Yes. That's what I thought.

Ms. Robinson, I'm intrigued by your comment about the "trades to degrees" program. I think that's a pathway to dealing with the stigma. It's an interesting statistic you gave us, if I got this right, that they're 26 years old when they're entering the system. Most people who go the academic route are exiting university before that, at 20-some years of age, and drifting for a period of time because they can't find anything. They're entering in third year, you said, for a bachelor's program. Could you expand on that?

Ms. Nobina Robinson: I would invite my colleague, Matthew Henderson, to tell you about NAIT in Edmonton. He has the details.

Mr. Matthew Henderson (Policy and Data Analyst, Polytechnics Canada): It's a certified tradesperson with management experience. It's someone who has been an entrepreneur, using their trade certification in an entrepreneurial—

Mr. Robert Morrissey: They have no academic outside of high school.

Mr. Matthew Henderson: They have a trade certificate, but you're correct, they have no other post-secondary experience.

They jump into the third year of a Bachelor of Business Administration program, where they'll learn entrepreneurship and things like that. The technical they have learned through their certification, and then they jump into the last two years of a BBA program to get that business sense to then perhaps expand their business. The hope is that some of these people will expand their small businesses, if they already have one, or start one and then hire apprentices. It kind of recycles and keeps this process going and going.

I should mention that NAIT isn't the only one of our members that has a pathway program such as this. At Conestoga College, in a lot of their diploma credentials they are learning apprenticeship techniques, such as welding techniques. They're finding that a lot of technicians require that skill. What they're able to do is then take that diploma and have advanced standing in, for example, a welding apprenticeship.

It's really trying to encourage as many pathways as possible so that when a student enters Conestoga College, after their first year they can then pursue other opportunities as well to combine and stack. It's about the stackability of credentials.

The Chair: Thank you.

MP Sangha, please.

Mr. Ramesh Sangha (Brampton Centre, Lib.): Thank you very much to all.

To Sarah Watts-Rynard, in your presentation you talked about building strong careers for students who come for training to the employer. You suggested four points, including employer engagement, evaluation objectives, and other things. I've been an entrepreneur in the legal profession in Brampton city, and I've come across many other entrepreneurs—accountants, truck workshops, car workshops, machinists, and other things. They're small businesses, but those small businesses also want to give students training when they are with them.

When they need someone to come and give them training, they need the infrastructure. They need the funds to spend. The employer either has to spend time on the student or he has to employ someone to give the training. What do you suggest to the committee? What type of program should we have for collaboration between government and the employers in terms of help? Should it come through those students or should it come directly to them? What is your suggestion?

Ms. Sarah Watts-Rynard: I go back to thinking about the way apprenticeship works in some European countries, as an example. Linkage between employers and the education system is fundamental. The integration goes to the lower levels of education all the way through to apprenticeship, and through to university and other credentials. There is a real understanding that education is the way that people become integrated into the labour market. It's not education just for the sake of education, but education for the sake of employment. As a result, I think employers start to develop a culture where it's not only their right but their responsibility to be engaged in talking about what education and skills are required.

I think we see a few different things. In the polytechnics, as an example, we see these program advisory committees made up of employers who are saying, "This is what we need, this is what you're doing really well, and these are the weaknesses." They're really providing opportunities to have employers integrated into those education systems.

Tim mentioned this idea of consortia, which works for small employers. Small employers that don't have the resources of their own might be able to get together through an association or with a union.

The unions have a number of joint apprenticeship training committees. Those become places where smaller employers can access workers right from the beginning of their apprenticeship all the way through in order to be able to connect with employment, and in many cases they can take some of the administrative burden off those smaller employers.

In Canada, 85% of all employers are small employers, so they don't have the resources. It becomes a matter of trying to understand.... We're not Germany. The economic model isn't the same and the businesses aren't the same, but I think there are ways to adapt some of that thinking into ways that work in Canada.

● (1645)

Mr. Ramesh Sangha: Nobina was telling us earlier that 80% comes from on-the-job training and 20% from the schools and universities. That on-the-job training means the employer has to do it all himself. Do you think the employer needs more funds, more sources, or more infrastructure? What types of things would you suggest to the committee to give them help?

Ms. Sarah Watts-Rynard: I guess it just goes back to the one in five skilled trades employers engaged with apprenticeships. Those employers would tell you that it's an absolute no-brainer. It's the best thing for their business. It's giving them the future leaders. It's giving them their ability to compete. It's contributing to their ability to develop people with the skills and knowledge they need to be productive within their business.

It's that four out of five who aren't engaged that I'm much more worried about. I think that in some cases they think that an apprentice, particularly in those first couple of years, is not as productive as they are throughout the later stages of their apprenticeship, so it's costing them the time and the money to invest in the training. That's where we start to think about how government can incent those employers to participate.

Number one, governments maybe can provide some wage subsidies to the smallest employers that are facing those resource constraints. Number two, governments can be the ones that are hiring and training apprentices instead of poaching them from the small companies that are doing the training. Also, they can find ways to support a business imperative for apprenticeship training, and this is where you start to get into infrastructure and procurement contracts that include provisions for apprenticeship hiring and training. This is important, because employers who may think it's too much time and too much money to hire and train an apprentice will start to think that the business imperative to getting that job is to be actively involved with training.

The Chair: Thank you.

MP Falk, please.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Thank you all for being here today.

I find this conversation really interesting because my riding, Battlefords—Lloydminster, is a rural riding. When I graduated from high school, and even before I graduated from high school, sure, the conversation was, "Where are you going to attend—U of S or U of A?", but it was also actually, "Are you going to go to SIAST or SAIT or NAIT?"

Lloydminster has been referred to as a little Fort McMurray in Canada. We have a lot of oil and gas there. I see a lot of parents encouraging their kids to take trades because of the opportunities they have. Even my family members encourage others to get a trade before they get a degree because they'll always have something to do. That's common verbiage.

I have a couple of questions. Regionally, my riding is in rural Canada, so in order to even attend post-secondary education, other than the college we have in Lloydminster, it's a three-hour drive either way. I'm wondering whether we have any information or statistics by region with regard to whether students are leaning more towards the trades in rural or urban, and that type of thing.

● (1650)

Ms. Sarah Watts-Rynard: Definitely, we see that in more rural environments, in general, if people have been farmers or have worked near mines, or have worked near forestry, they see opportunity to stay in their communities and to work in the skilled trades. I think there's still a push that for bigger and better you should go to university, but we definitely see that rural students certainly have more exposure and perhaps are given greater opportunities to stay home and work in the trades. It then just becomes a challenge about the technical training. You do actually see schools like Saskatchewan Polytechnic doing fantastic work around distance learning and trying to minimize the time that someone has to be away from home to go to the technical training school.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: That was another thing I was going to mention. When I went to high school, we actually had shop class. You could do welding. You could do construction. You could do electrical. You could even do clothing, textile, and fashion, all of those hands-on things. Students switched schools. If someone was in the Catholic school and they wanted to go to public school because it offered automotive, that's what they did. It's great to see that this is happening in some schools in the country.

I have another question, and I guess it would be for Ms. Collins.

You mentioned—and correct me if I'm wrong—that your schools are located in urban centres.

Ms. Mary Collins: Yes. As of 2016, they were in Edmonton and Calgary. However, now that we have the outreach, we go out to first nations communities and Métis settlements and bring the program out to them. As well, as part of the program, they build tiny homes as their hands-on project.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: That's awesome. Do you notice a difference with attendance? Do you find that you have more students who are in the outreach program over the number coming into the city to go to school?

Ms. Mary Collins: Can you clarify?

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: I'm just wondering if you find that you have better attendance by going to where the students live than you have with them driving into Calgary or driving into Edmonton for classes.

Ms. Mary Collins: Yes, the attendance of course is better because we're right in their community, so then they have their own community members or the departments that we partner up with, so I'm thinking they're a little bit more comfortable closer to home. There are also probably fewer barriers as well since they are in their own home community, when you look at child care, transportation, and all of those things.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: That's one thing that I noticed too, because I live in Lloydminster, and we're right on the border; we have to drive places. Even just the cost-of-living increases when you have to drive places and there's the carbon tax. I'm just wondering if that is a barrier, or if you've noticed since the carbon tax was implemented in Alberta whether that is affecting students' ability to get to school.

Ms. Mary Collins: Yes, it is. Transportation was already an issue as well, but now it's just compounded in regard to the tax.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: Okay. Thank you very much.

The Chair: You have about 30 seconds.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: I have a quick question. We've heard the number 26 in terms of the age of those entering apprenticeship programs. Does anybody know or have statistics on how many of those people have a previous degree from university?

● (1655)

Ms. Nobina Robinson: You know what? The lack of data in this G7 country really drives me crazy, so I'm going to give you proxy answers.

In the world of the polytechnics, some 25% of our post-secondary students are reporting prior post-secondary experience. Some 15% are reporting prior university degrees, but in the trades piece, I don't have it as a whole. I can't speak for the whole country, but you'd have to figure that they've done something else before they decided to sign up and become an apprentice at the age of 26.

The bigger problem, though, is also why we are not talking about how long this will take to complete. If you start at 26 and there are four levels of apprenticeship, you're going to be 30 or 32 before you get your ticket, and some of this is pretty labour-intensive work. That's the completion issue that was raised earlier.

We really need better data. Statistics Canada gives you an annual snapshot of how many apprentices are registered. That doesn't mean anything, because you could have registered but not be pursuing your trade. It only surveys apprentices every seven or 10 years. We need better real-time data about the different pathways.

Your question is right. I wish I could answer you. We can give you some proxy answers.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

MP Fortier, please.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Mona Fortier (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Thank you all for joining us today.

I am pleased that we are talking about hard data, because our government makes decisions based on hard data. The return of the long-form census is one example of the importance of having precise data in order to move forward.

I would like to go back to women's participation. We talked about it briefly earlier. In the last budget, the one for 2018, the federal government announced measures to encourage under-represented groups, such as women, to choose apprenticeship training in a specialized trade.

Would providing subsidies for women who choose a male-dominated program encourage women to participate in programs of that kind? Are there other measures that you were not able to tell us about that would encourage young women to become interested in apprenticeship programs?

Let me ask Ms. Watts-Rynard to start.

[*English*]

Ms. Sarah Watts-Rynard: When it comes to some of the things announced in the budget, and specifically the incentive grants for women who are under-represented, it only works if they have fewer than 15% women in that trade in terms of being eligible. When we think about the average age of a newly registered apprentice being in the mid-twenties, women come to apprenticeship even later, as a general rule. They tend to be single mothers who have decided that the skilled trades are something they want to pursue because they want to be able to make a living for their children and for themselves.

In that particular case, when you think about having to take care of child care issues and all of the responsibilities that come with parenthood, absolutely any kind of financial support is helpful. In general, that's an issue for all apprentices in a way that it really isn't for a number of other post-secondary students. They're no longer supported by their family. They have mortgages, cars, and children. They have those responsibilities.

On some of the other announcements and some of the other support for women in trades, I think there is so much work being done across the country by terrific groups that are really engaged with role modelling, mentoring, and providing opportunity. We see the unions heavily involved with under-represented groups in general and certainly in trying to bring women into the trades.

I think any kind of funding and support that helps them do that work on a more consistent basis is a good thing. They're not going to be able to run a program that becomes self-sufficient. They need employers. They need unions. They need the government to be able to support that work on an ongoing basis in order to sustain role models, mentors, and supports that are the reality when really in most trades we're talking about the 3% or 4% who are women.

● (1700)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Mona Fortier: My time is quickly running out, but there is one area I would like us to focus on, new Canadians. We did not hear a lot about them in your presentations.

Can you give us an idea about how new Canadians participate in apprenticeship programs? If possible, focus on young people. How are we going to reach those new Canadians?

[*English*]

Ms. Sarah Watts-Rynard: New Canadians are as under-represented as women are. I mean, women are 50% of the population and we're talking 3% or 4%. Newcomers are a smaller proportion of the Canadian labour market, but still we're talking about 3% or 4%. They're drastically under-represented in the trades.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Mona Fortier: Ms. Robinson, do you want to add anything?

[*English*]

Ms. Nobina Robinson: I would concur, but I don't have data points at hand, because in the end, a student is a student is a student. We're not asking them those kinds of things. However, I will say this. I am an immigrant myself. There was a large tradition of immigration from certain South Asian countries. Those parents are also part of the bias system. They come to Canada because they want their kid to get a degree. Are we educating immigrants about the opportunities in the labour market offered by these trades professions?

You can think about how we're all British-inherited countries. Whether you're from India or Pakistan or certain countries in Africa, this notion that newcomer parents want their kid to have a degree means that therefore they're not going into the trades. That's a bias issue.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Mona Fortier: So what do we do to change that perception of the differences? I completely agree that a degree and an apprenticeship program should be considered on the same level. In my opinion, both are equally valuable and equally important. How can the government find solutions, in your view?

[*English*]

Ms. Nobina Robinson: We're all talking about awareness. One solution is awareness through data. Another one is to talk about the success stories.

As well, how about a module on national labour market information for guidance counsellors across the country? We would get the information to those in grade 6 and grade 7. There may be other organizations that could do this. For instance, my organization wouldn't, but we really need to get to the people who have the first contact with the young person.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Mona Fortier: Okay.

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Karen Vecchio, you have five minutes.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Thank you very much, and thanks for allowing me to come back today.

Thank you for speaking on what you're talking about. I've had children in post-secondary education, and of course I also went to school. I remember how back in the 1980s, if you said that you were going to college, that was, like, not cool. You needed to go to university. There was too much a dividing of things. I think it's really great that we've brought that up.

As has been discussed, a lot of times that disconnect is because very few people who are teaching in our high schools, other than those in automotive and welding, have anything but university education. We know that there's a total disconnect.

Ms. Robinson, I really like your idea about how we get that information out to our schools. Last year I had a principals' meeting, and we talked about a program called "meet the maker". The chamber of commerce in our community put together the meet the maker program. All of the different manufacturing groups came together and allowed the students to come through and see what they did. There was some hands-on experience.

Are any of you familiar with programs like meet the maker, where students are able to come and see for themselves in a different forum, while not going into the setting of the manufacturing facility, what people are actually doing with their skills? Are there any other things like this across Canada?

Ms. Nobina Robinson: First of all, I think we really need a repository of all the good things that are going on. I know that the research at the Canadian Apprenticeship Forum does that. My colleague Matt has a couple of little anecdotes to tell you. In this case, perhaps the plural of anecdote is "data".

Matt.

Mr. Matthew Henderson: Sometimes it's just those best practices. There's a lot of lament when we visit our members about the absence of shop class in those secondary school programs. In the absence of that, some of our members have been taking initiatives that are targeting pre post-secondary students.

I have two quick examples from Conestoga in Kitchener-Waterloo. Both targeted the under-represented group that is young girls. One of them is called "Jill of All Trades". It's an event for grades 9 to 12 to pursue careers in the trades. They basically hold an annual event that provides opportunities for almost 200 young women from eight local school boards to explore a variety of trades through hands-on workshops and seminar-style things. It kind of prepares students for what to expect, and encourages them to pursue that path.

The other one is the trades and technology day. This is for grades 7 and 8. So you have something for grades 9 to 12 and then a targeted program for grades 7 and 8. Again, it's very similar, with seminars, workshops, and expectations. This is really just to encourage people on the diversity of pathways, especially at a young age.

It's also an opportunity to show them, as you said, outside of the manufacturing setting, in the schools. As Nobina said in her statement, some of the classrooms are so innovative; all it takes is to go to one, look at it, and say, "Wow. This is great. I would love to learn about this." It's not just hammer and nails anymore. It's tablets. It's computers. It's apps. It's the whole nine yards. I think programs like that are extremely important in terms of showing the diversity of pathways that young people can take.

● (1705)

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: What is the federal government's role here? It sounds to me as though we could do a very community-oriented base development. What could the provincial and federal governments do to assist with this epidemic that we're going to be falling into as Wayne Long talked about. You said it will be 1,200 people shortly. There are jobs and spaces, so what can we do?

Ms. Sarah Watts-Rynard: I really should point out that the federal government does currently fund Skills Compétences Canada and Skills Canada Ontario and Skills Canada New Brunswick and across the country. Their competitions do include hundreds of thousands of school kids being able to come through and try a trade, in addition to kind of an Olympic-style competition. The Skills Canada Ontario competition is going on now. They do a national competition every year. The winners of the national competition will go to the international competition.

So there are groups like that that are currently funded. Are there opportunities for more? There are always opportunities for more. This is such a small opportunity, but it still gives kids hands-on opportunities across their experience.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: That's awesome.

I have one more question. The retention rates that we see in the STEM fields for women university graduates are rather low. Do you see the same things in trades? Once women have graduated from the trade programs, do you see the retention is there or is it like what we're seeing in other STEM fields?

Ms. Sarah Watts-Rynard: We're finding retention in apprenticeship is low, but retention post-certification is higher. They now have the certification and they can open their own business. They can move to wherever their skills are in demand. But certainly within the scope of the apprenticeship, retention rates are poor. That is a workplace culture issue we have to address.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Madam Sansoucy, go ahead for three minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

A number of you have said that we could be doing what they are doing in Europe. Last September, I accompanied the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour to Turin. We visited a centre there that the government had mandated to stimulate enrolment in training and apprenticeship programs for young, disadvantaged immigrants, specifically from the flood of immigrants from Africa.

The people in the centre, whose mandate was to properly pair up employers with apprentices, noticed that a third person, a social worker, was needed. The employers, who were often SMEs, were somewhat ill-equipped to deal with the family problems the apprentices could be going through, either because of their children or their parents. Apprentices could also be experiencing various difficulties, or could come from a criminal background, and the employers did not have the resources they needed to support them. So the centre received funding to meet the young peoples' needs in all aspects of their lives, and to set them up for success in their apprenticeship programs.

Do you think that could be transferred here to complement existing apprenticeship programs?

[*English*]

Ms. Sarah Watts-Rynard: I certainly think there are lots of opportunities to engage newcomers. We speak to the youth across the country. We actually held an event very recently with newcomer youth. They said their biggest barrier was not a disinterest in the trades, but simply because, as Nobina has said, that their parents would be disappointed in them. They've given up so much to come Canada, given up so much in the move, that they really feel as though they owe it to their parents now to pursue as much education as they can possibly get and to have a job as a doctor or a lawyer or an accountant, because those are considered by their family and by their friends to be—

● (1710)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: I was asking about disadvantaged young people, not necessarily immigrants.

[*English*]

Ms. Sarah Watts-Rynard: What we see is that there are a number of programs that try to deal with youth at risk and deal with under-represented groups. As you say, the trick is making sure we're supporting them through all of the additional challenges. They have the same challenges every apprentice has. White male apprentices have difficulty completing their apprenticeship and becoming certified, so all of those additional challenges that might be related to their home life or language and all of those things.... We have to be able to surround those people with the kinds of supports they need, so absolutely programs like that work.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Ms. Robinson, do you have anything to add?

[*English*]

Ms. Nobina Robinson: Yes, I just wanted to broaden this out. I'm not sure in which country you saw that model.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: It was in Italy.

[*English*]

Ms. Nobina Robinson: We need to talk about the fact that we are bringing in newcomers of all ages, not just young people. One of the things the education system can do that is really important is a bit of advisement and navigation...skills assessment, skills advisement, and "Did you know...?" That can broaden into, "You need this academic gap filled, you need that workplace skill, and in Canada, workplace culture is like this." All that advisement is an important public good. Who does it? How does it get delivered? This provincial program is sitting on top of that federal program. It's a complex mess. I think some of the work that you will be doing in coming back to ESDC—in your report around all of this—is there should be better career navigation, advisement, and helping people with things like skills assessment: "Here, did you know you're good at that?" We call that prior learning assessment. That's something colleges and polytechnics do regularly.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

That brings us to the end of the second round of questions. I don't often ask a question, but I haven't heard something that I was hoping to hear.

We talked a lot today about culture. We've talked a lot about some of the challenging issues with teachers and guidance counsellors. I think those are valid, but when comparing our situation and our current system with Europe, there's something that we have not talked about. I challenge anybody here to challenge me if I'm mistaken, but you were talking about the professionalism.

There are two really big factors as to why the trades are much more respected in Europe. One, they're paid more. Two, they're stable. This is why I think part of the culture here in Canada—whether it's right or wrong—is parents don't necessarily want their kids to go into construction, because they don't believe it's paid sufficiently compared to a university degree, and it's not stable. You hear about all these people getting laid off and so on.

I ask anybody up there if there's anything you can add to that idea, about whether we should look at those two things?

Mr. Terence Snooks: Ms. Robinson mentioned that there's not enough data on the wage earning to tell people what they're actually making. I'll tell you that a journeyman plumber, steamfitter, pipe welder, or service tech makes $55 to $60 an hour. There are not a lot of jobs in this country that are going to pay $50 to $60 an hour, but you need to sustain that.

That goes to an argument over where you're situated.

The Chair: Right.

Ms. Nobina Robinson: The harping on about Europe is something I've been going on about in all the time that I've done this job, but then I realize that in Europe, a banker can be an apprentice. We don't do that here, right? Our trades professions are limited and defined, compulsory, non-compulsory, jurisdiction....

The beauty of the European model—be it in Switzerland, Finland, the Netherlands, or Germany—is that many more professions are apprenticeable than we permit in Canada. We didn't say that all of these other technicians and technologists are apprenticeable. When you get into the apprenticeable trades that we have here, we need to talk about the earning power. That's where I had begun.

● (1715)

The Chair: Thank you, all of you.

I believe you've all contributed to this study. We've been waiting to get back to this for awhile. I'm glad we have gotten back to it, so thank you all very much.

We are going to suspend for a few moments, and ask you to vacate. We have about 10 minutes of committee business.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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